

# ACCESS AMERICA

## Black History Month Honors Stories of Determination and Triumph



*Carter G. Woodson, founder of Black History Month.  
(National Park Service)*

Washington -- Each February, Black History Month honors the struggles and triumphs of millions of American citizens over the most devastating obstacles -- slavery, prejudice, poverty -- as well as their contributions to the nation's cultural and political life.

2008 marks the 82nd annual celebration since Carter G. Woodson, a noted scholar and historian, instituted Negro History Week in 1926. He chose the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

The celebration was expanded to a month in 1976, the nation's bicentennial. President Gerald R. Ford urged Americans to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

Woodson, the son of former slaves in Virginia, realized that the struggles and achievements of Americans of African descent

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were being ignored or misrepresented. He founded the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), which supports historical research, publishes a scholarly journal and sets the theme for Black History Month each year.

The theme for 2008, "Carter G. Woodson and the Origins of Multiculturalism," honors Woodson's contributions and his belief "that America should embrace the cultural differences that newcomers brought with them to America," according to

### FROM THE AMBASSADOR

Black History month gives us pause to remember that we continue to evolve as a nation. While we celebrated our independence in 1776, declaring that "all men are created equal," it was not until much later in our history that we accepted the full meaning of this ideal and began to work for equal rights for all Americans.

Today, Americans continue the struggle to realize the dream of equal rights. Many great Americans have contributed to this work, and one of the most important was Martin Luther King, Jr. Today, 45 years after King's magnificent "I Have a Dream" speech, we are watching the third African American Senator since Reconstruction run for the presidency of the United States. We have our second African American Secretary of State. And more African Americans than ever are climbing the ladder of success and realizing their own dreams in our land of opportunity. We are a nation coming to understand the words of Black History month founder, Carter Woodson: "We should emphasize not Negro History, but the Negro in history. What we need is not a history of selected races or nations, but the history of the world void of national bias, race hate, and religious prejudice." America may not yet have reached "the promised land," as King put it, but we see it on the horizon and are striving toward it.

—Robert F. Godec

## From the IRC

### Check out these new books :

*Countervailing Forces in African-American Civic Activism, 1973-1994.* Harris, Fredrick C., Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and Brian D. McKenzie, eds. Cambridge University Press, 2005  
**(323.1196 HAR)**

*When Affirmative Action Was White.* Katznelson, Ira. W. W. Norton, 2005 **(323.1197073 KAT)**

*Afro-American Literature. The Reconstruction of Instruction.* Fisher, Dexter and Stepto, Robert B., eds. The Modern Language Association of America, 1979 **(810.9896 AFR)**

*This is our music : Free Jazz, the sixties, and American culture.* Anderson, Iain. University Pennsylvania Press, 2007 **(781.655 AND)**

*Race, Social Reform, and the Making of a Middle Class: The American Missionary Association and Black Atlanta, 1870-1900.* Jewell, Joseph O. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007  
**(305.55089 JEW)**

*Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America.* McWorter, John. Gotham Books, 2006 **(305.89607 MCW)**

— Khaled Ben Bhouzid  
& the IRC team

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the ASALH Web site. Woodson and other black intellectuals of the early twentieth century believed that democracy “required tolerance of difference and could sustain those differences in harmony.”

John Fleming, ASALH president and director emeritus of the Cincinnati Museum Center, believes Black History Month should focus on both positive and negative aspects of the black experience.

“Certainly, struggle has been an ongoing theme in our history from the very beginning,” he said. “However, we were not slaves prior to being captured in Africa -- and while slavery was part of our experience for 250 years, we have a hundred-and-some years in freedom that we also need to deal with. That’s not to diminish the slavery period, but it’s not just the most encompassing thing.”

Fleming said he has seen “substantial progress on many fronts,” noting that about 10 percent of congressional representatives are black as well as hundreds of mayors across the United States, and that more blacks are “moving into the middle class and various professions.”

“At the same time there are still major problems that have to be addressed, one being the permanent underclass in urban areas now -- we don’t seem to be able to break that cycle of poverty. And there are still some major rural pockets of poverty” such as in the Mississippi Delta, he continued.

“I’m glad to see the National African American Museum being developed on the Mall, which will tell a much broader story,” said Fleming. In 2003, President George W. Bush signed legislation to establish the new museum, which will be located on the National Mall near the Washington Monument.

## PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENTS

### NESA UGRAD Program

Five or ten month undergraduate study in the U.S.

[http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/latest\\_announcements.html](http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/latest_announcements.html)

### Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program

Nine month academic and professional training program for mid-career professionals.

[http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/latest\\_announcements.html](http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/latest_announcements.html)

### Fulbright Science and Technology Award

Fully funded PhD program in the science and technology fields at U.S. university.

[http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/latest\\_announcements.html](http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/latest_announcements.html)

### Fulbright Foreign Student Program

Masters or one year PhD research program at U.S. University.

[http://www.amideast.org/programs\\_services/exchange\\_programs/fulbright/application\\_tunisia.htm](http://www.amideast.org/programs_services/exchange_programs/fulbright/application_tunisia.htm)



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Although the new museum has not yet been built, it has launched a photo exhibition that is housed at the National Portrait Gallery.

"From talking with young people, black and white students, the lack of knowledge about African-American history is just appalling," Fleming said. This applies to the general population, he said: "That's why Carter G. Woodson came out with Negro History Week in the first place."

"I think that African-American history gets more attention during February than during any other time of year," he said, "and I think it's an opportunity for us in the field to emphasize that it is something that should be studied throughout the year."

Each year, the U.S. president honors Black History Month, or African American History Month as it is also called, with a proclamation and a celebration at the White House. States and cities hold their own events around the country, and media feature topics related to black history.

"Throughout our Nation's history, African Americans from all walks of life have offered their



*The 2007 Black Heritage stamp honors the first lady of song, Ella Fitzgerald. (USPS)*

talents to the betterment of American society," Bush said in this year's proclamation, issued on January 29. "We are reminded of their courage in their struggle to change the hearts and minds of our citizens. While

much progress has been made, we must continue to work together to achieve the promise and vision of our great Nation."

*—Adapted from an article on [America.gov](http://America.gov), a web site delivering information about current U.S. foreign policy and American life and culture produced by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs.*

## HISTORICAL TIME LINE:

### AFRICAN AMERICANS WHO LED THE WAY (1966 TO PRESENT)

**1967** - President Lyndon B. Johnson appoints **Thurgood Marshall** to the U.S. Supreme Court, the first African-American Supreme Court Justice.

**1968** - Civil rights leader **Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** is Assassinated on April 4th on the balcony of the Loraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee.

**1974** - On April 8th, "**Hammerin' Hank**" **Aaron** hits his 715th career home run, breaking Babe Ruth's 39-year record.

**1975** - **General Daniel "Chappy" James, Jr.** becomes the first African-American officer in any of the U.S. military branches to rise to the rank of four-star general.

**1977** - The television miniseries "**Roots**," based on Alex Haley's Pulitzer Prize winning book, brings African-American history to the mainstream watched by 130 million viewers

**1989** - Four-star general and former National Security Advisor **General Colin Powell** becomes the first African-American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest American military post. In 2000, Powell would become the United States' first African-American Secretary of State.

**1993** - Author **Toni Morrison**, becomes the first African-American writer to receive a Nobel Prize.

**1995** - In February, during the first joint Russian-American Space Program mission, **Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr.** became the first African-American astronaut to walk in space.

**2004** - **Barack Obama** is elected to the U.S. Senate from the state of Illinois, making him the third African American elected to the Senate since Reconstruction in the first Senate campaign (against Republican Alan Keyes) in which both major opponents were black.

**2005** - **Dr. Condoleezza Rice** becomes the first African American woman to serve as Secretary of State. During President George W. Bush's first term, she was also the first African American Woman to serve as National Security Advisor.



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



### Abdelkarim Sellami

#### International Visitor Leadership Program

##### Home in the United States

Washington, L.A, Ohio,  
Rochester, NY

##### Home in Tunisia

Hencha, Sfax

##### Fondest memory of the U.S.

Three years have now ticked away since I last visited USA; nevertheless I am still fascinated by the people's good heartedness, kindness and hospitality towards us. What the Americans and their country have done to each other is so remarkable and unforgettable. Every place tells a story of its own.

##### Briefly describe your experience

I will not forget the deeply rooted Tuniso-American relations that go back to 1865 especially when I saw the giant photo of Mohamed Sadok Bey, the bey of Tunisia then.

It was really a great opportunity to get to know the American civilization from inside and to study Her judicial system which highly appraises the status of judges reflected in their

commemoration of the memory of their predecessors (John Marshall, Chief Justice 1801-1855).

##### Lessons learned

Americans agreed upon a minimum common ground "the constitution" and preserved the right to differ. This

happy marriage between unity and diversity is faithfully reflected in the different States' regulations and judicial systems and in the Federal laws that govern the national as well as the international interests of the USA.

The judicial system is characterized by its response and reaction to time. One best instance is the Court of the Future which employs cutting-edge technologies to ensure the good and fast judicial process (Rochester Court).

I was especially amazed by the addiction treatment/ rehabilitation court with its new and avant-garde way of dealing with addicts which aims at preserving and rehabilitating people rather than punishing them.

##### Advice for others

I would tell them to rid themselves of prejudices about American people and USA. They are a fertile source of knowledge to be seized rather than rivaled. Their modesty is the cornerstone of their success. I would also advise them to master the English language as it is the master key to get closer and interact with this people.

## Calendar

### Free English Conversation

#### Every Thursday

American Corner at AMIDEAST  
4:00 PM

*Weekly discussions on topics from films and music to religion.*

### Study in the USA Consultations

#### Every Tuesday-Friday

AMIDEAST Advising Resource  
Library  
9:00 AM-4:00 PM

*Browse materials from U.S. universities and other resources on applications and scholarships.*

### Open Access

#### Every Monday-Friday

American Corner at AMIDEAST  
10:00 AM-6:00 PM

*Peruse materials in English on topics from history to pop culture and more.*

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